



The Role and Professionalism of School Counselors in Merdeka Belajar Curriculum

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Abstract. Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is a policy in the new era of education. Since the Covid-19 pandemic hit in 2020, the Ministry of Education and Culture has taken the best approach to fulfill the students' rights and obligations through Merdeka Belajar curriculum. Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is a new breakthrough in the aspects of learning. The success of teachers and students to carry out online learning optimally in Merdeka Belajar curriculum will certainly have an influence on student development. This certainly provides a new challenge for the role of school counselors in dealing with issues that arise in the student learning process, especially those related to technological advances and online learning. With the new learning system approach in Merdeka Belajar, school counselors need to adjust well by providing guidance and counseling services in innovative and relevant ways to answer the needs of the students. In carrying out their professionalism, school counselors have an important role in setting an example for students to continue to innovate in the midst of progress, change and the demands of technology.

Keywords: The Role of school counselor · Merdeka Belajar curriculum · Professionalism

1 Introduction

School counselor is a profession to help students in facing challenges in daily life. Moreover, school counselors give a positive influence to the development of society (Gibson et al., 2010; Nosich in Kurniawan, Saputra, Daulay & Zubaidah, 2020). Thus, to maximize the results of guidance and counseling services, school counselors need to equip themselves with competencies in accordance with the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia No. 27 of 2008 concerning Academic Qualification Standards and Counselor Competencies that cover pedagogic, personality, social and professional competencies (Regulation of the Minister of National Education, 2008). School counselors as professional educators should build a good image in the community by being a good role model. School counselors need to continually improve their services, expand their knowledge, provide direction and encouragement to their students (Taher, Aditama & Syam, 2021). Gibson & Mitchell (2011) explain that the

development of the counseling profession depends on the changes based on the new knowledge. There are several things that need to be done in improving the professionalism of counselors, namely: 1) to improve standards for counselor preparation, 2) to give attention to special areas, 3) to increase the use of technology, 4) to focus on empirical results, 5) to renew the traditional theories of the profession, 6) to renew the attention and expansion of career counseling parameters, 7) to give attention to public communication, social activities, and political nature, 8) to identify the relevant counseling program, 9) to build awareness of multi-cultural activities, 10) to be aware of the globalization, 11) to deepen the urgency of online counseling.

Based on the above information, the development of technology, the globalization and the rapid growth of online counseling, show the impact of technological developments on counseling services, where school counselors should develop their skills in the field of technology as well. Yusuf and Nuhrisan (2014) also stated that the school counselors need to constantly improve the quality of their competencies. One of the ways to improve the quality of the school counselor is to master the skills in technology. In accordance with this demand, Merdeka Belajar curriculum policy emerged along with the development of the industrial revolution 4.0 era and the Covid-19 pandemic. It requires the needs for new literacy, namely data literacy, technological literacy and human literacy (Ratnasari & Neviyarni, in Mufidah, Wulansari & Mudhar, 2022). Facing the transformation of technology and policies towards Merdeka Belajar curriculum, school counselors need to prepare several innovations, especially in applying the counseling services (Rahma, et al. in Hayati, Mudjiran, Nirwana & Karneli, 2022). According to Nursalim (in Hayati, Mudjiran, Nirwana & Karneli, 2022), school counselors need to improve literacy skills which include data literacy, technological literacy and human literacy. Moreover, school counselors need to identify the changes in student behavior and attitudes, namely generation Z, their new lifestyle due to technological developments, such as online game addiction, bullying, etc. The implementation of guidance and counseling service also has an important role in the future needs of the students in order to help them in developing their potential, talents, interests and abilities to the fullest (Arumsari & Koesdyantho, 2021).

Unfortunately, the implementation of the curriculum has not been fully implemented due to various problems. The readiness of human resources and supporting facilities are some of the challenges faced by the policy of Merdeka Belajar. It is important for both school counselors and the future school counselors can meet the challenges of civilization in the future (Nanda et al., 2020 in Rosandi & Andriyani, 2020).

2 Methods

This research uses descriptive qualitative approach with library research method, based on the collection of several journal research articles and other relevant sources such as books and related literature references. Classification, description and content analysis are described in the discussion.

3 Result and Discussion

The aim of National Education is to shape the character of the students in order to have faith in God Almighty, have noble character, healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, become democratic and responsible citizens (Law No. 20 of 2003 on National Education System, article 3). To encourage students in having beliefs and good deeds as stated in the law above, school counselors are required to have more abilities in carrying out their duties as educators. Guidance and counseling program is an integral part of the educational process, where it also gives contribution to the success of the education process in schools. Thus, the educational process in schools will not be successful if it is not supported by the implementation of good guidance and counseling program (Hazrullah & Furqan, 2018).

Minister of Education and Culture, Research and Technology, Nadiem Anwar Makarim, officially launched Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. Merdeka Belajar curriculum was developed as a curriculum framework that is more flexible and centered on learning materials and develops the uniqueness of student's abilities. The main focus of Merdeka Belajar is student-centered, where all students have the equal opportunities to receive learning experiences. "The Ministry of Education and Culture stated that there are 4 ideas for changes that support the existence of independent learning programs, which are related to the National Standardized Examination (USBN), National Examination (UN), Learning Implementation Plans (RPP), and Zoning Regulations for Admission of New Students (PPDB)" (Mustagfiroh, 2020) (Marisa, 2021). The stand-alone curriculum is designed to support learning recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. It is the freedom of learning for teachers or students that is emphasized in Merdeka Belajar (Koesoema, 2020).

In Merdeka Belajar, learning atmosphere is built to make the students feel comfortable. Students are encouraged to sharpen their character, especially in fulfilling Pancasila student's profile and not focused on academic performance only. By implementing Merdeka Belajar, where project-based learning will provide more opportunities for students to actively explore factual and relevant issues. The advantage of the existence of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, it focuses on simplicity and more in-depth. The focus is on the important learning aspects and measure the student competencies based on their needs. Second, it is more independent. Teachers teach according to the ability and level of student development.

In accordance with the Minister of Education and Culture's policy of Merdeka Belajar, school counselors need to understand the regulation of Merdeka Belajar in-depth and identify the implementation instructions for Merdeka Belajar program. Furthermore, it is important for the school counselors to understand their role in the school community. Several experts have formulated the role of school counselor including Gibson & Mitchell (2011). Based on their point of view, the role of the school counselor is the agent of change, the prevention agent, the career developer, the counselor, the consultant, the coordinator, and the assessor.

The roles that have been formulated by these experts can be carried out by school counselors in the successful implementation of Merdeka Belajar curriculum. In Merdeka Belajar curriculum, school counselors should provide guidance and counselling service

online, innovate creative approach to introduce guidance and counseling service (Example: become a content creator by giving a promising guidance and counseling program), providing counseling to students in order to set their learning targets, create individual planning and specialization for student's career counseling, etc. School counselors are expected to become the agent of change and the preventive agent in a new era of education transformation – especially when online learning is taking place, the school counselor needs to adjust with technology and offer new ways of guidance and counseling service, integrating with the advanced of technology (Nursalim, 2020).

In addition to the important role played by a school counselor, the professionalism of the school counselor also holds an important aspect in supporting the success of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum. Professional counselors provide services in the form of mentoring coordinating, collaborating and providing consulting services that can create equal opportunities for all the students (Dahlan, 2017). In providing counseling services, a school counselor is required to have expertise, skills, integrated insight into counseling approaches, strategies and techniques that can be implemented through various types of counseling program and services (Hazrullah & Furqan, 2018). Suherman AS (2007) explained that the rapid growth of science, the continuous progress of technology, as well as the development of arts and cultural aspirations, provide opportunities for the school counselor profession to continuously develop and improve their performance. Through these opportunities and challenges, globalization brings new values that need to be translated by all parties, including school counselors (Suherman AS, 2007). In carrying out Merdeka Belajar curriculum, school counselors need to prepare themselves in order to accomplish the objectives of Merdeka Belajar curriculum and give positive impact on the students (Mufidah, Wulansari & Mudhar, 2022).

4 Conclusion

Guidance and counseling has a great role not only for students but also for the government and for the future of our society. Due to Covid-19, school counselors have faced difficulties. School counselors need to embrace these changes as a positive challenge and opportunity to grow. School counselors need to strong strategies to strengthen their services, especially in preparing the implementation of Merdeka Belajar curriculum. Moreover, the school counselors are expected to create the advanced technology techniques which will be able to manage the privacy during online counseling, where counseling session can be conducted without any obstacles. In order to develop their professionalism, school counselors need to enhance their knowledge and skills in using technology as one of the tools in optimizing guidance and counseling service in school, especially in applying Merdeka Curriculum. Merdeka Curriculum has opened the opportunities for school counselors to improve further in answering the needs of the society and industry revolution 4.0.

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